DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 281 PS 030 552

TITLE	Adolescence: A Time That Matters.
INSTITUTION	United Nations Children's Fund, New York, NY.
ISBN	ISBN-92-806-3737-1
PUB DATE	2002-02-00
NOTE	43p.
AVAILABLE FROM	UNICEF, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017 ($10). E-mail: pubdoc@unicef.org. For full text: http://www.unicef.org/pubsgen/adolescence/adolescence.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescent Attitudes; *Adolescent Development; *Adolescents; Brain; Child Health; Child Welfare; Childhood Needs; *Childrens Rights; *Daily Living Skills; Developed Nations; *Developing Nations; Developmental Stages; Foreign Countries; Program Descriptions; Social Problems; Well Being; *Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS	Brain Development

ABSTRACT

Noting that there are an estimated 1.2 billion 10- to 19-year-olds in the world, this report examines the challenges faced by adolescents in both developing and developed nations. The report describes adolescence as a complex transition during which youth take on new responsibilities and experiment with independence. The importance of the development and reorganization of areas of the brain responsible for planning, organization, judgement, problem solving, and emotional control is discussed. The report asserts that as adolescents undergo this fascinating journey, they need access to information, skills, and services. It is argued that they need to feel safe, supported, and connected to adults in their lives. The report asserts that society has an obligation to shepherd its youth through their adolescent years and to treat them with respect and understanding. When society assumes these responsibilities, the benefits multiply in ways never imagined. Quotations from youth illustrate various frustrations and pressures they encounter. The report also describes the impact of several life skills educational programs in developing countries. The UNICEF Web project linking youth from diverse social classes and economic backgrounds from all over the world is also described. The report concludes with a section, "You Need to Know...," delineating facts on HIV/AIDS, sexuality, pregnancy, childbearing, violence and exploitation, smoking, drug and alcohol use, mental health and suicide, working and employment, and nutrition. (KB)

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ADOLESCENCE

A TIME THAT MATTERS

ED 467 281

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Mural painted by students from El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, an artistically based public high school for human rights in Brooklyn, New York (United States). The school's mission is "to inspire and nurture leadership, and build bridges for human rights and community development." El Puente's community murals act as public service announcements, covering issues such as smoking, drug use and racism. (Photo by Alexia Lewnes.)

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Adolescence is one of life's fascinating and perhaps most complex stages, a time when young people take on new responsibilities and experiment with independence. They search for identity, learn to apply values acquired in early childhood and develop skills that will help them become caring and responsible adults. When adolescents are supported and encouraged by caring adults, they thrive in unimaginable ways, becoming resourceful and contributing members of families and communities.

Bursting with energy, curiosity and spirit that are not easily extinguished, young people have the potential to change negative societal patterns of behaviour and break cycles of violence and discrimination that pass from one generation to the next. With their creativity, energy and enthusiasm, young people can change the world in astonishing ways, making it a better place not only for themselves but for everyone.

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At about age 10, girls and boys begin the long trek through adolescence. With its jagged and undefined paths, the fascinating journey can be demanding and disorienting, invigorating and exciting. It marks the beginning of a quest for identity and for a way to find meaning and a place in the world.

There are an estimated 1.2 billion young people aged 10-19 in the world – the largest generation of adolescents in history. More than four fifths of them live in developing countries, particularly in urban areas.

They publish newspapers and magazines, run businesses and become elected leaders in their schools and communities. Many of them manage households, care for younger siblings and ailing parents and educate their peers about life's challenges and about protection from diseases, such as AIDS, and the dangers of high-risk behaviours, such as smoking. Many also work 15-hour days in factories

My dear young people: I see the light in your eyes, the energy in your bodies and the hope that is in your spirit. I know it is you,

and fields, risk their lives on the front lines of armed conflict, marry and have babies when they are still children themselves. They are imaginative, energetic and impassioned about the world and their place in it.

What happens to these young people affects us all.

A TIME THAT MATTERS

This second decade is one of the most complex transitions of life, its breathtaking pace of growth and change second only to that of infancy. Physically, children go from being small and compact one day to being all legs and arms the next. They mature sexually. They also develop the capacity to reason in more abstract ways, explore the concepts of right and wrong, develop hypotheses and think about the future.

As they move out into the world, adolescents take on additional responsibilities, experiment with new ways of doing things and push for independence. They

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not I, who will make the future.
It is you, not I, who will fix our
wrongs and carry forward all that
is right in the world. – Nelson Mandela
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start to question themselves and others and begin to see the complexities and nuances of life. They also begin to think about such concepts as truth and justice. The values and skills they develop over the years will benefit them immediately and over the course of their lives.

During adolescence, young people establish their emotional and psychological independence, learn to understand and manage their sexuality and consider their future role in society. The process is gradual, emotional and sometimes unsettling. A young person might feel disappointed, disillusioned and hurt one minute; ecstatic, optimistic and in love the next.

As they grapple with physical and emotional changes, today's adolescents must also cope with external forces over which they have little control. Demands of culture, gender, globalization and poverty have pushed millions of adolescents prematurely into adult roles and responsibilities. Civil war and unrest, HIV/AIDS, industrialization, urbanization and rising unemployment have dramatically undermined the education and development of millions more. As traditional social networks unravel, the structure of families is reshaped and sometimes demolished, and the capacity of family and community support systems shrinks. With their world lacking safety, consistency and structure, all too often adolescents are left to make difficult choices, largely on their own.

The Swahili proverb, "A son will be what he was taught," illustrates just how much young people learn from examples set by those around them. Many of the risks adolescents take are not so much a reflection of their own attitudes and wishes but rather are the consequences of pressures exerted on

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them by some adults – by the abusive and exploitative ways some may behave, by the examples they may set and by the policies and laws they may create.

At a time when boys and girls are becoming men and women, gender stereotypes are perhaps the most influential of all pressures. Young women may learn, for example, that they are considered adults only when they are married, and even then they are expected to be submissive and obedient rather than decisive and active. Young men often learn that it is considered manly to exercise authority and control over girls and women and even appropriate to abuse them and behave violently towards them.

in the most desperate situations.

passion can engender hope, even

Invest in adolescents: Watch them thrive

Adolescents have rights – as expressed in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child – including those to information and skills; access to services, such as education, health, recreation and justice; a safe and supportive environment; and opportunities to participate and to have their voices heard. Countries that have ratified the Convention are required to take all necessary measures to secure these rights.

Yet time and again around the globe, societies are faced with the symptoms of their collective failure to fulfil and protect adolescents' rights. Adolescents are bearing the brunt of the AIDS epidemic: About half of the new HIV infections occur among young people 15-24 years old. Some 4 million adolescents attempt suicide each year. An estimated 300,000 children risk their lives as child soldiers, most of them adolescents. Nearly 1 million children enter the sex trade each year. One tenth of all births are to teenage girls, and in many countries, complications related to pregnancy, abortion and childbirth are the major cause of death among adolescent girls (15-19 years old). For young men, violence and accidents are a leading cause of death. About 20 per cent of school children are regular smokers. As much as 70 percent of all preventable deaths among adults, such as coronary heart disease, lung cancer and AIDS, result from health-related patterns and behaviours that began during adolescence. Adolescents are making decisions that have lifelong consequences without adult guidance and support, and without the knowledge and skills to protect themselves.

The toll of neglect

Adolescent childbearing and health complications related to smoking and unsafe sex take economic as well as human tolls.

- The World Bank estimates that in high-income countries, smoking-related health care accounts for between 6% and 15% of all annual health care costs. (The vast majority of people who smoke become addicted during adolescence.)
- In the United States in 1996, the federal Government spent over $38 billion to provide services and support to families that began with a birth to a teen.
- In a Thai study, families spent on average $1,000 during the last year of an AIDS patient's life – the equivalent of an average annual income.

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USE IT OR LOSE IT

Starting in adolescence, four levels of abstract thinking emerge at ages 10, 15, 20 and 25.

At 10... A child begins to understand single abstract concepts like morality and society.
By 15... An adolescent can understand and relate two or more abstract concepts and perceive ambiguities and contradictions.
By 20...The brain can coordinate several abstractions and begins to resolve contradictions.
By 25...The brain is able to evaluate knowledge and combine it in highly complex ways to construct new ways of understanding and knowing.

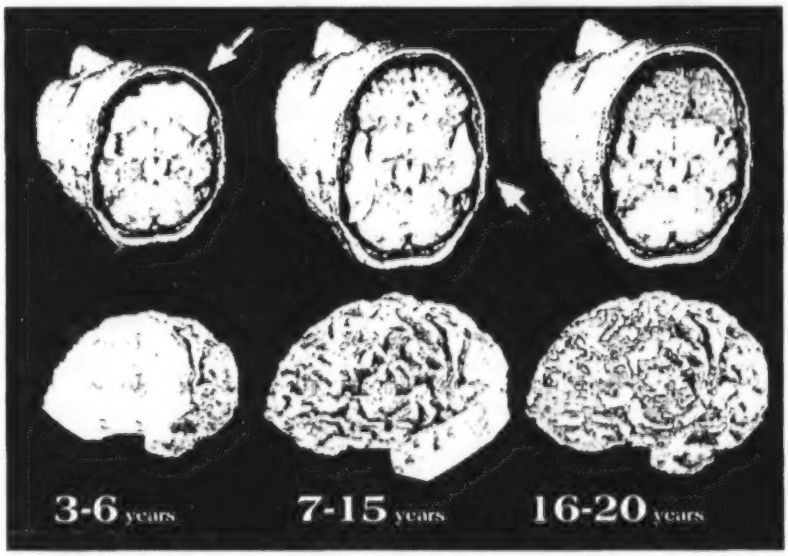
But these rich and very important nuances emerge during adolescence only with support, which can come from parents, teachers, coaches, older youth, supervisors, religious and spiritual advisers or others who encourage and support young people to 'exercise' their analytical and abstract thinking.

(Adapted from Kurt W. Fischer, Director of the Mind, Brain and Education programme at Harvard Graduate School of Education.)

"A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death," said Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, in an address to the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. When adolescents' rights are protected, their strength, creativity and passion can engender hope, even in the most desperate situations. The world will not solve its problems until it learns to do a better job of listening to what young people have to say and then collaborating with them to bring about needed change.

ANOTHER WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Neuroscientists once believed that nearly all the brain's wiring was connected by the time a child entered nursery school, and the only remaining developmental task was to secure those connections. Now recent studies show that the brain experiences a continual cycle of growth every few years and that, beginning around age 11, an explosion of electrical and physiological activity occurs, dramatically reorganizing billions of neural networks that affect emotional skills and physical and mental abilities. The amount of gray matter in some areas of the



Rapid growth in frontal circuits: attention, vigilance, alertness

Growth spurt in temporal/parietal lobes: languages, mathematics

Tissue loss in frontal circuits: self-control, planning, regulate behavior

Image courtesy of Paul Thompson Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Neurology, UCLA School of Medicine.

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brain can nearly double within as little as a year. Then from the mid-teens through the mid-twenties, unneeded cells are purged and the brain continues to reorganize itself.

During early adolescence, there is a phenomenal jump in abstract thinking. The prefrontal cortex (located behind the forehead) develops important new functions and does not fully mature until age 18. It acts as a commander-in-chief, responsible for planning, organization, judgement, problem solving and emotional control. In addition, areas of the brain associated with functions such as integrating sights, smells and memories develop during adolescence, as does the language area of the brain.

As the brain reorganizes itself, patterns form based on which connections are reinforced by mental or physical activity. Scientists believe that the teen years may be a critical time to exercise the brain and that adolescents who learn to marshal their thoughts, measure their impulses and think abstractly may lay important neural foundations that will last throughout their lifetime. They also think that young people who participate in sports, academics or music positively reinforce those connections as the circuits mature.

On the other hand, trauma, abuse, neglect and excessive use of drugs and alcohol can also change the circuitry of the brain, scrambling both its architecture and chemistry. Because these influences can significantly and negatively affect brain functioning and learning capacity, they can ultimately limit an adolescent's future choices and opportunities.

In Their Own Words: A Dream Slipping Away

In 2000, 24 young people (aged 14 to 22) who live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories were brought together by UNICEF to participate in a three-week journalism course. In the wake of the renewed crisis in the region, members of PYALARA – the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation, which produces a monthly magazine by youth for youth – put into practice the skills they gained during the training.

UNICEF provided cash and cameras to document and publish stories by the young people, who wrote about the frustrations and pressures they have encountered in trying to create a peaceful, democratic and equitable Palestinian society and how the conflict has affected their communities. Their stories reflect the tragedy of the crisis: A new generation of young people – children of the peace process – is losing hope. The following are excerpts:

"Dreams of tomorrow for many young people my age are connected with going out on dates, organizing or attending a party, or buying a much-wanted new outfit or CD. In my case, however, thinking about tomorrow leaves me scared – scared that I might leave my home in the morning, never to return, or else to return in the evening, only to hear that more of the people I care about have been injured or killed. For me, tomorrow is vague, dark and scary. I ask you, is that fair?"

–Dalia, 17

"Yes, I believed in peace and dreamt about it every night…but as everyone knows, dreams have a nasty habit of never coming true, and now, I no longer dream of peace. Why? Because even as I write, I hear the sound of shooting, and no matter how hard I try, I can't get the sound of the 'zaghrouteh' (mournful wail) of a martyr's mother out of my head."

–Saleem, 18

"Just today, while talking on the phone with one of our young journalists, something struck me. She was telling me how a bullet had been fired inside her grandmother's house some time yesterday, passing through the side of the washing machine and coming out the other. The girl, who is only 13 years old, told me how she had tried to comfort her grandmother and tell her that everything would be okay, and how she wanted to go to sleep at her grandmother's house and 'protect her' should anything happen. It was then that I realised that THIS is the reality of our children, that they are being forced to face the harsh realities of life before their time…."

–Marianne, 22

"No wonder I am sad and angry! My friends, be they in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Tulkarem, Qalqilya or Gaza, are all suffering. We all want justice, but nobody seems to be doing anything to stop the bloodshed, so it is only natural that we are gradually despairing, believing that the light at the end of the tunnel that so many once spoke of is becoming more and more distant."

–Siham, 15

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Nurturing potential

In many societies, adolescence is not considered a distinct developmental period and there is no clear consensus that adolescents have rights. In some countries, poverty, war, early marriage and AIDS thrust children into adult roles while they are still very young. Girls, in particular, are affected by social and cultural values that place a greater value on boys.

Parents are critical in providing support and guidance to young people; individuals, extended family members and schools all play an important part in this as well. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the ways adolescents connect to their social world influences their health and development and protects them from high-risk behaviours. Consistent, positive, emotional connections with a caring adult can help young people feel safe and secure, giving them the resilience to manage the challenges in their lives. A study of American, Australian, Colombian, Indian, Palestinian and South African 14-year-olds found, for example, that across cultures, adolescents who are well connected with their parents (they feel understood, are cared for and get along well with their parents) have more social initiative, fewer thoughts about suicide and less depression.* When parents don't have the capacity to meet their children's needs, extended families, neighbourhoods, schools and peers become crucial in providing that connection.

When adolescents have close, reliable relationships, their self-confidence improves. When they feel connected, they are more likely to benefit from additional 'protective factors', which can help them form coping strategies and develop positive self-esteem. Connectiveness is critical in creating a safe and supportive environment where young people feel both autonomous and protected – where they

* Dr. Brian Barber of the University of Utah

In Their Own Words: Living with HIV

Mary was barely 17 when she contracted HIV. Her teenage boyfriend had been the only constant person in her life, and when he suggested they have sex she reluctantly agreed, despite her strong Catholic faith. In a single sexual encounter she lost her virginity, became pregnant and was infected with HIV.

Mary was a secondary school drop-out in Kenya, struggling to pass her tailoring trade tests, when she learned the news. Her grandmother could not forgive her for becoming pregnant, and her childhood sweetheart had disappeared from her life. When the relationship with her grandmother became intolerable, Mary moved in with friends. She supported herself through casual jobs – washing and cleaning. Today, 21-year-old Mary wonders at her misfortune.

"When I went to the antenatal clinic, the nurse said they would need to test my blood for anaemia and sexually transmitted diseases. I did not mind this: after all it was for my welfare and the health of my unborn baby. At my next antenatal visit, the nurse had my blood test results ready. I was anaemic, she said, and I would need to eat more beans and green vegetables. She then asked me if I knew anything about syphilis and gonorrhoea. I said yes, I knew they were sexually transmitted diseases. She told me that these had not been found in my blood. But, she added, they had found another disease, called HIV. For this reason I would from now on attend a clinic at the Kenyatta National Hospital, the national referral hospital. I was barely listening. I was telling myself they had made a mistake, and mixed up my blood test results with someone else's. I was also telling myself that I was not worried. She must be wrong. I prayed she would finish talking so I could leave. When I stood up to go, I realized I had wet myself.

Life skills education teaches:

- **knowledge that prevents**

"At Kenyatta Hospital I found other women who were openly talking about their HIV status, and this helped to ease my shock and fear. The doctor at the clinic also explained what the implications were for me and the baby I was expecting. Here at least I got good counselling and support.

"I put up a brave front with the people I was living with. I did not want them to know. My baby died at four months, and as I went through another period of joblessness, some friends of mine suggested that I join Women Fighting AIDS in Kenya. Here, I have found a lot of support, through my work as a public educator and assistant herbalist, as well as through interacting with others, getting my opportunistic infections treated and of course earning a small allowance.

"Even though I have come to terms with my status, I do not want my close friends and family to know. Stigma is one of the daily challenges I and many like myself have to contend with. I talk to groups in distant schools, churches and clinics. My message, especially to young people, is: 'While the pleasures of sex last but for a few minutes, the sorrows of sex last forever.' I try to tell them that sex is not oxygen, and while it has its rightful place in our lives, when misused it can bring lifelong suffering."

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are exposed to positive values; are guided with structure, supervision and rules; are provided with opportunities now and a sense that they will have opportunities in the future; and have the freedom to explore their identity, express their opinions and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

As young people start to turn their attention away from home, their view of themselves, their parents and the world shifts dramatically. With greater autonomy, they no longer see themselves as children, but they recognize that they are not yet adults. They begin looking for answers to a multitude of questions. To form their identity and grow to be healthy, responsible, productive and ethical adults, adolescents need to be given access to support systems and opportunities to develop close and durable relationships, to feel a sense of worth and to feel valued in the community. Without such support, they become much more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

• **skills that protect.**

• attitudes that respect

A RIGHT TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

In order to make informed decisions and to understand how the choices they make will affect their lives, adolescents need *access to relevant and reliable information* from a variety of sources, including parents and other family members, teachers, the mass media and peers.

Schools can reach large numbers of young people, creating an environment in which good health as well as education is pursued and reinforced throughout the day. They can offer health education and life-skills training, provide good nutrition and promote exercise. But young people also learn in other ways: from their family, neighbours and peers, in the marketplace, in places of worship, in communities and from the media.

As adolescents enter the larger world, they are increasingly influenced by their peers and by adults other than their parents. They begin to explore their sexuality and to stretch and test themselves intellectually, creatively and socially through sports and other recreational activities.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING...

■

In Namibia, young people aged 15 to 20 receive life-skills education through a participatory 10-session, 20-hour course entitled 'My Future Is My Choice'. Conducted mainly in schools, the programme is designed to strengthen young people's reproductive health knowledge as well as their interpersonal communication, negotiation and critical thinking skills. Young people conduct the training, distribute the materials, work with the schools and clinics involved in the programme and provide follow-ups to the graduates. Each graduate of the programme prepares a peer education plan to reach at least 10 friends or becomes a member of an AIDS-awareness club. Over 90,000 young people have completed the 20-hour programme. Around 30% have remained active as peer educators through AIDS-awareness clubs.

■

Educating young people about HIV/AIDS protects them and opens doors for dealing with such issues as discrimination, violence and teenage pregnancy.

In Romania, over 8,000 youth attended a mega-concert in which 29 of the nation's top bands donated their time to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS among young people. A team of young volunteers distributed posters to promote the event. A message about HIV/AIDS was shared with the audience at the beginning of each band's performance. The event was televised live and a recording was broadcast repeatedly throughout the country. Numerous bands became volunteers of the non-governmental organization ARAS (Romanian Association Against AIDS) that organized the event, and approximately 100 youth became peer educators in schools.

■

A project for girls in Pakistan is reaching out to more than 25,000 girls aged 12 to 18 who live primarily in rural and urban slums. Community members identify 50 girls who are trained on the rights of children and girls, adolescent health and hygiene and leadership skills. The girls are then given a choice of receiving further training towards establishing home schools or learning first aid. Participating girls act as role models, demonstrating to communities the importance of investing in the development of girls.

■

Since 1997, young people 17 and older have run the Youth Azeri Parcel Service (YAPS) in Azerbaijan. The service's 30 drivers, all orphaned and many raised in institutions, deliver mail and parcels to more than 125 clients – from individuals to large companies – in and around the capital city of Baku. Disabled youth work as supervisors. Depending on their jobs, the young men and women receive training in English, customer relations, computer proficiency, radio communication and office management, as well as how to repair the delivery scooters.

■

In Bangkok (Thailand), young women from poor provinces are offered career opportunities in the hotel and service industry through the Youth Career Development Programme, launched jointly by the Pan Pacific Hotel in Bangkok and UNICEF. The young women trainees, usually aged 17 to 20, spend five months learning the basics of the hotel trade: food and beverage services, hospitality, floristry, housekeeping, cooking, laundering and English language skills. They also attend workshops on AIDS education, career planning, child rights and protection. Graduates can continue to work in the hotel where they trained or in hotels and restaurants in their home province. Still others pursue schooling and higher education. The programme is now sponsored by 18 other major hotels in Bangkok. One private hospital in the city provides three additional months of training in nursing.

■

In Liberia, a vocational training project helps to reintegrate the country's war-affected youth into their communities. There are eight vocational training programmes in which boys are trained in agriculture and masonry, and girls in tailoring and cooking. All children receive literacy, numeracy and life-skills education. More than 6,000 children have participated in these programmes.

■

In India, rural young people between the ages of 14 and 24 in three states work with village committees to create a detailed plan with clear responsibilities and deadlines to address school enrolment, attendance, retention of students, remedial education and infrastructure improvement. Each village nominates three volunteers who coordinate the activities, and 15 to 20 youth volunteers help implement them. By March 2000, close to 1,400 villages had implemented village education plans. In most of the participating villages, enrolment in primary schools is 100% and the committees have shifted their focus to retaining students and improving the quality of education. The committees are also drawing up plans for health, water and sanitation, as well as other activities to improve the quality of life. A number of these villages have started groups to educate adolescent girls.

■

In Brazil's Amazon region, adolescents in the city of Belém help out-of-school children, including gang members and children who live and work on the street, enrol and stay in school. Around 23 adolescents and 12 adults coordinate Make the Other One Beautiful, a project begun in 1997. In 2000, volunteers they trained visited 360 families, identified 206 children who were out of school and helped enrol nearly all in local primary schools. The project also supports art, dance, sports and cultural programmes that make school more welcoming to students. "Before, I used to hate school and hang out in the streets," says Christiane, a 13-year-old project volunteer. "Now, school is fun."

To support them in this exploration, adolescents need to develop *life skills* – skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision-making and communication. These can help them develop strong friendships, resolve conflicts peacefully, cooperate in groups, build self-esteem and resist peer and adult pressure to take unnecessary risks. Life-skills education can help develop these skills and teach adolescents about citizenship, work skills and ethics, parenting and caregiving.

A RIGHT TO DEVELOP INTO RESPONSIBLE, PRODUCTIVE AND HEALTHY CITIZENS

Education is a key to the fulfilment of other human rights and the catalyst for realizing human potential. Quality education fosters inquiring, analytical thinking and healthy habits and is essential for preparation for life. Ensuring the right to education is both a moral and a social justice imperative. It is also a matter of economic common sense. In this new and information-driven century, the world simply cannot afford to waste so much human potential.

In Their Own Words: LEARNING TO SAY "NO"

Every week Asmita, 16, attends classes at a local health clinic for out-of-school slum girls living in Mumbai (India). Girls who participate in the Adolescent Girls Initiative Project learn about reproductive health issues and, through creative activities and role play, develop skills to protect and defend their rights both within and outside the family.

"These classes are very important because we have to be educated. It helps us make decisions, earn money and stand on our own feet. The family progresses only when a woman is educated. I have learned that it is my right to say 'no' when a boy wants me to do something that I don't want to do. If I need help, I can go to my parents, and if they can't help me, I can go to my friends. Every girl has to have support while she is getting strong. We must support each other as we get stronger. But we have to reach the family if we are going to be empowered to make decisions. Parents need to learn these things and, if they want to have relationships with girls, boys have to be educated too."

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TEENAGE FATHERS GET A HELPING HAND

For over 20 years, the Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation has encouraged more than 26,000 teenage mothers to continue their education and to learn a skill. Recognizing, however, that addressing the problems associated with teenage pregnancy requires working with adolescent boys as well as girls, in 1999 the Centre began a programme for teenage fathers.

Both girls and boys benefit from the Young Men At Risk Counselling Programme. 'Baby fathers' learn how to become better parents, and at the same time increase their employment skills and opportunities. The teenage mothers and babies benefit from the additional emotional and financial support the boys are able to give.

The programme operates in all seven Women's Centres throughout Jamaica. Each centre has a part-time counsellor and teachers who conduct evening classes in English, mathematics, electrical installation and technical drawing. During the day, the young men receive counselling in legal matters and in resolving personal problems. Speakers are invited to discuss career choices, parenting, reproductive health and sexually transmitted infections.

According to Pamela McNeil, founder of the Women's Centre, fear had kept many young men from becoming better fathers. "For some, it's gangs," said McNeil. "Others are afraid of the parents of the girls; some fear the police. This fear causes some of them to run away from their responsibilities. Most of them want to be good fathers but they are not sure how." Over 1,000 'baby fathers' and other young men aged 16 to 25 have participated in the programme.

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To encourage adolescents to stay in school, schools should have flexible schedules, strive to eliminate gender bias and be relevant to young people's daily lives, especially for poor children who must combine economic activity with education. Quality 'second chance' education programmes offer essential tools of literacy and numeracy, close the gender gap and help older adolescents realize their full potential.

When young people work, they not only generate income but also develop their skills, increase their knowledge, build self-esteem and confidence and glean a positive view of what their future might hold. Programmes that develop *opportunities for livelihoods* enable adolescents to develop a range of skills including literacy and numeracy, technical, entrepreneurial, practical (such as how to access credit), social (how to work with others), managerial, strategic (how to recognize long-term consequences of present choices) and life skills.

Adolescent-friendly health services provide a supportive environment in which to address adolescents' reproductive health and psychological needs and well-being, as well as a place where teenagers are able to discuss matters of major concern in their lives and seek professional and non-judgemental advice. Such facilities provide counselling and practical services in reproductive health,

In Their Own Words: Drugs Are the Symptom

Kirill Roudenko, 14, works as a television journalist at the Youth News Service in Moscow. He has become involved in the fight against drugs, which are threatening the lives of the city's youth.

"I've decided to be involved in TV because the press is the best way to inform people. There are so many problems in Russia that need to be discussed and covered. The drug problem is really terrible in Russia and in the capital, Moscow, which soon can be a national catastrophe. The official data about drug addicts can be easily multiplied by 10.

"I know many people on drugs myself and even was offered to do drugs. These drug addicts go on drugs to get away from other problems. The society needs to change, so there are less problems to run away from. It is very important that the youth anti-drug campaign is run by the youth, because the young people are getting the information from people their age, whom they are more likely to trust. I'm very optimistic about the future of Russia. It's such a big country and has so many great people."

including testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), access to contraceptives and HIV/AIDS prevention information, as well as confidential testing and counselling. They should offer treatment for common diseases (such as tuberculosis and malaria) and advice on nutrition and mental health problems. They need to have trained staff, involve young people, be supported by the community and be free or low cost.

A right to feel supported and safe

Young people's ideas are constantly being shaped and influenced by their environment. When adolescents have opportunities to learn and express themselves without fear, they are more likely to be engaged with their parents, their peers and their communities. They gain self-esteem and become positive role models.

National and local laws must also promote and support adolescents' rights, and young people should participate in the development and monitoring of these policies.

Adolescents who are denied opportunities for growth and feel trapped by circumstances may come into conflict with the law. Even young people who feel supported

WHAT'S HAPPENING...

In August 2000, a Tehran (Islamic Republic of Iran) juvenile judge, in a watershed decision, sentenced a young offender to learn a vocation instead of serving time in jail. Since then, the Tehran judge has issued similar alternative sentences, and two juvenile judges in other provinces have followed this initiative. There are nine juvenile courts for children under 18 in Tehran, and at least one in each other major city.

Male offenders under 18 in Tehran are sent to the Tehran Juvenile Correction and Rehabilitation Centre (JCRC), where they receive vocational training in masonry, carpentry, welding, gardening or word processing. Boys who pass the vocational course are eligible to take the Ministry of Labour exam to be certified, which makes finding a job easier after release. A music therapy project has also been initiated to improve cooperative skills and respect among the boys and to promote independence and self-confidence.

There are at least six provincial JCRCs and the Government has made the establishment of JCRCs in all provinces a priority. In 1999, the country's first Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre for girls under 18 was established, where more than 300 girls are detained.

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UNICEF/00-0590/Hernandez-Claire

and optimistic about their futures may respond to their growing independence by testing the limits of their freedom. The manner in which society responds to a young lawbreaker can make or break a young person's future.

"Punishment does not purify; if anything it only hardens children," said Mahatma Gandhi. Increasingly, communities are recognizing that incarcerating young people in facilities designed to punish rather than rehabilitate can create embittered adults who lack the skills to be productive and responsible citizens when released.

Adolescents have a right to a *separate and responsive juvenile justice system*. Whenever possible, young people should be released into the care of their families to await trial in their own homes, and alternative sentences should be explored, including community service and residential placements in education and treatment facilities. Children and adolescents who are detained have a right to separate facilities from adults, and every effort should be made to encourage contact between detained young people and their families. Education and rehabilitation should be the main priorities.

A RIGHT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As adolescents mature, they look for a sense of belonging in the larger world. When they are given a wide range of opportunities to make an impact, adolescents learn, grow and thrive. The contributions they make in their homes, schools and communities and through municipal councils, youth associations, the media and international conferences can inspire and ignite lasting change. They can transform the world.

Increasingly, national and regional *Youth Forums* give youth a platform to identify and express their opinions about issues that affect their lives. Young people analyse their current situation and present their visions and recommendations to leaders for future actions. Country and regional Youth Forums have been held around the world including in Bangladesh, Jordan, Mongolia, Thailand and in Eastern Europe.

In Their Own Words: Voting to be Heard

Sandra Jimenez Loza, 13, was born with cerebral palsy. As a child rights activist in Mexico, she inspired hundreds of thousands of children to register their opinions in the Children's Consultation held during last year's presidential elections.

"The last thing I would consider an obstacle is my disability. If anything, it's a plus. When people see that I don't consider it a problem, it shows them that they can also reach their goals. It is important for children to be listened to because we are also citizens. After all, we are the ones who will rule the world and the country in the future.

"Promoting the Consultation hasn't changed my life but being an advocate for children's rights has. There are many countries where children suffer much more than in Mexico and that is why I am very interested in getting to know people who are fighters for human rights.

"Thanks to processes like this, children and young people can participate in one step. And we have to take advantage of these small steps because they come together in a bigger way, opening up places and spaces in which we can participate and take part in society – not only in this country but around the world. I like what I'm doing now and want to keep doing it. But to keep being an advocate for children's rights, the best job for me would be to be Secretary-General of the United Nations. Then I know I would be listened to."

What do young people think?

In Latin America and the Caribbean region's first youth opinion poll, nearly 12,000 young people aged 9 to 18 were asked more than 70 questions about themselves, the society they live in and their expectations for the future. The poll represented the opinions of 103 million young people throughout the region.

What did they have to say? Children feel they're not being listened to at home or in school; they believe that they will have a better future than that of their parents, although they think that their countries will be worse places to live; and they dream of a country inhabited by decent people, a country with no delinquency and a stronger economy, where peace and social equality reign.

Youth Parliaments, established in Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco and Senegal, provide an opportunity for young people to express their views to the government and to become partners in planning strategies for lasting change.

Finally, national youth *opinion polls and referendums* enable young people to voice their opinions and concerns to the government, media and general public. They can be important tools to mobilize political support for programmes.

When encouraged to express their opinions and feelings, to be assertive and to stand up for what they believe, adolescents are more likely to have self-esteem and self-confidence and develop their skills and capabilities. They become better equipped to deal with an abusive, threatening or unfair situation because they are in a much better position to seek advice, exit a harmful situation when necessary or cope creatively when they cannot leave.

If given a voice, young people can provide important information about conditions at work or at school, about risks to their own health and their community. They can provide suggestions for change that adults may not have considered, and they can play a vital role in researching, monitoring, evaluation and planning.

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Young people have demonstrated great courage and conviction while standing up for what they believe. From the streets of Prague (former Czechoslovakia) where they protested against Soviet occupation, to Little Rock, Arkansas (United States) where they challenged school segregation, to Soweto (South Africa) where they cried out against apartheid, to Hamburg (Germany) where they marched against child labour around the world, young people have made differences in their communities and have changed the course of history.

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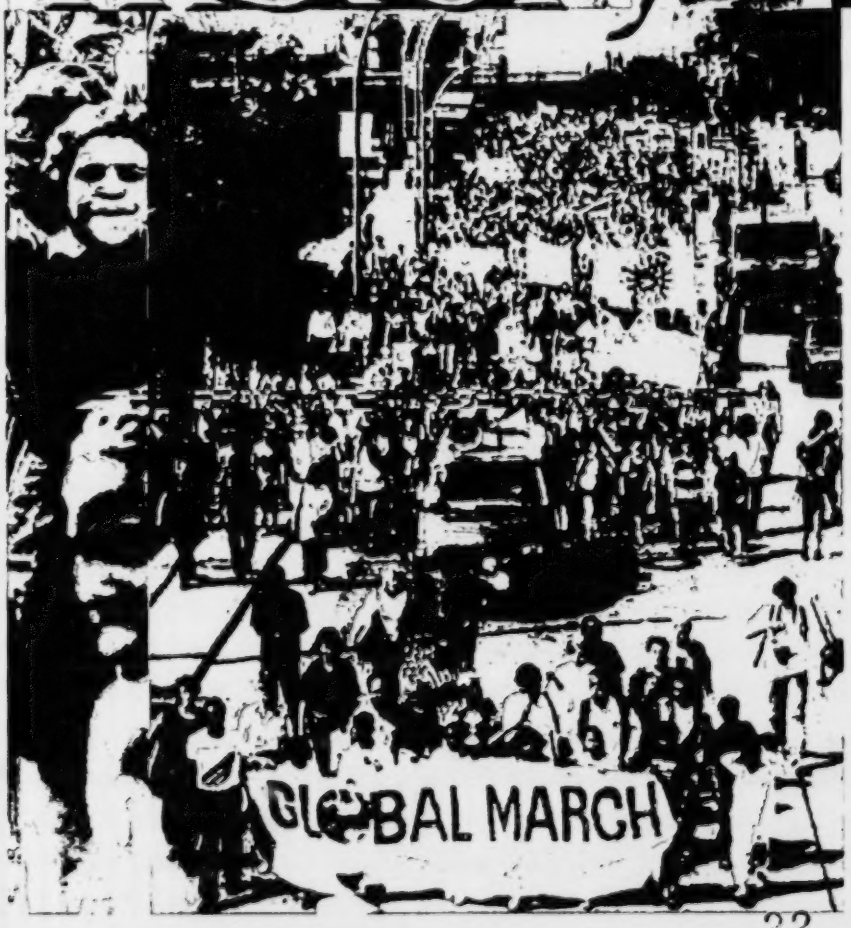
History

From top, left to right: AP/Wide World Photos, © Will Counts, © Peter Magubane; AP/Wide World Photos.



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What every adolescent has a right to know

Who would know better than young people themselves how to capture the attention of youth? For this reason, UNICEF will be working with adolescents on a new communication initiative called What every adolescent has a right to know.

Adolescents have a right to information – but information alone does not lead to the adoption of safe behaviours. Information needs to be presented in compelling ways and messages should be reinforced by the simultaneous use of multiple communication channels – from peer education to radio and TV, from traditional media and role models to dialogue with parents and health care providers. Adolescents also need to learn life skills, so that they can put into practice the knowledge they acquire.

The initiative will actively engage adolescents in developing innovative communication strategies. The project is intended to reach the most vulnerable youth with information and skills so they can protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and acquire livelihood skills. Young people will be trained in how to conduct participatory research, as well as on the strategic use of various communication channels such as TV, radio, peer education, theatre, films and the Internet.

To find out more about this initiative or to become involved, please contact Silvia Luciani, UNICEF Senior Communication Adviser, at sluciani@unicef.org.

In Their Own Words: Healing Wounds

Noeline Clarke, 17, is Secretary of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum.

"I myself grew up in a Protestant area. I never thought I would associate with anyone Catholic. Then I decided that I'm going to change all that, and if there's going to be change, then there is a need for people to motivate other people. When I find myself in a room with the two religions, I feel that I can motivate them to come together and to realize that there are no differences between us whatsoever. I want the two communities to come together....

"We are trying to get young people to tell us what they think their rights should be. Then we're going to try to get the government to decide if this is going to be possible. We need to be listened to not just by the government but by our elders. We need the support of our communities and our families.

"There is still a big majority of people my age who realize how much work needs to be done to make the place better. Things are changing through youth coming together."

Working in different types of media can be a creative and dynamic way for young people to participate. Television, radio, print media, theatre, puppet shows and comic strips can be used in creative ways to stimulate learning as well as provide an outlet for adolescents to express their opinions and affect change.

Participation by adolescents does not negate the vital role of adults or imply that adults should relinquish their responsibility. Rather, it promotes a healthy dialogue and exchange. Adolescents and adults have a mutual responsibility to work together.

A work in progress

Derived from the Latin verb *adolescere* (to grow into maturity), adolescence is a period when character crystallizes and identity forms. It is also a period when many adolescents are contributing to society in remarkable ways: as parents, workers, caretakers of young children and elders and as role models.

There are no simple solutions, no single intervention that can respond to the multiple challenges facing adolescents today. They need access to information, skills and services. They also need to feel safe, supported and connected to adults in their lives. Society has an obligation to shepherd its young people through their adolescent years and to treat them with respect and understanding. When it assumes these responsibilities, the benefits multiply in ways never imagined.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING...

■

In early 1999, Kosovar Youth Councils were created in six refugee camps in Albania to engage nearly 20,000 young people aged 15 to 25 who were struggling with the upheaval and violence they had endured, as well as with the boredom and a loss of direction and self-confidence. The Councils, with help from youth volunteers from the Albanian Youth Council, were encouraged to assess problems, identify possible solutions and set priorities for action. The Councils became partners for UN agencies and NGOs involved in the crisis and initiated a number of activities including sports tournaments, concerts and cleaning of the camps. They worked on integrating new refugees, setting up camp schools, organizing psychosocial and recreational activities for younger children and contributing to the improvement of security conditions in their camps. Although the rapid return of refugees to Kosovo interrupted the Councils' activities, the experience gave young people an opportunity to develop their leadership and organizational skills and practice cooperation, all invaluable in helping rebuild Kosovo.

■

Summer camps in Lebanon have encouraged debate on children's rights among 10- to 16-year-olds from all walks of Lebanese society: children in conflict with the law, working children, children living in institutions and those with special needs. To help break down stereotypes, able-bodied children also attended summer camps for children with disabilities. The camps were conceived as a way of encouraging young people to speak about their worries, identify problems and suggest solutions. Representatives were elected to present the group's suggestions for solutions and ways in which young people could participate in implementing them.

■

The multimedia Sara initiative, launched in eastern and southern Africa in 1996, helps young women make the transition into adulthood. Sara is an animated cartoon character, around 14 years old, who makes important life decisions, such as whether to stay in school or how to deal with difficult adults. The episodes generate discussions on key issues affecting adolescent girls, including HIV/AIDS, the unequal workloads of boys and girls, teenage pregnancy, sexual abuse and early marriage. They also demonstrate essential life skills, including effective communication, negotiation and problem solving. An animated film series is the flagship of the Sara initiative, complemented by radio programmes, comic books, story books, audio cassettes, posters and guides. Evaluations of the project demonstrate how girls are using their new skills. For example, when girls' parents were unable to pay their school fees, the girls negotiated with other members of their extended families to obtain the fees. Sara has also encouraged girls to use assertiveness and negotiation skills to avoid female genital mutilation and sexual abuse, as well as to resist pressure from their peers.

■

In a city-wide playwriting competition in Romania, Bucharest high school students wrote about HIV/AIDS to educate their peers. The scripts depicted real-life situations that demonstrated good and not so good decision-making regarding safe sex, along with the consequences. Two plays were selected by judges to be performed in English and in Romanian at local high schools and at the Bucharest Theatre Festival. The plays were not only performed by high school students, but they were also directed, produced, designed and promoted by the young people. The peer education drama pilot project, run by the NGO ARAS, is being held this year as well, and it is expected to become an annual event in cities throughout the country.

■

In South Africa, 'loveLife' uses television and radio to give teenagers an opportunity to talk about what many consider to be taboo subjects, such as adolescent sexuality. A survey of 1,000 people revealed that 63% felt that 'loveLife' was very effective, and 86% felt that open and frank communication is "very important" in preventing HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy and STIs.

UNICEF/00-0440/Balaguer

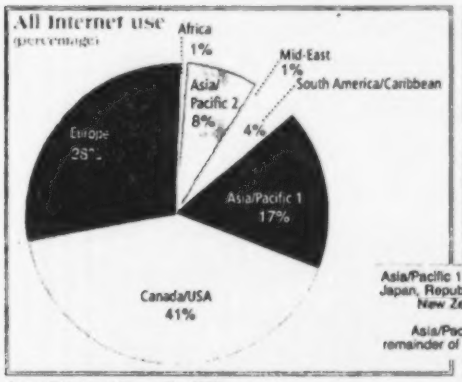
Voices of Youth

"My name is Alison. I am 17 years old and from Kenya. As a young African, Kenyan girl it is so frustrating to see the stereotype of the African child and the African youth in images made by people of particularly the West.... If I tell a western person that I don't have flies on my face while my mother carries water on her head in a desert with lions in the background, most of my Internet friends are very surprised. When the time comes for me to play a role in the world, there is none left for me because others' prejudices, backed up by images which they have selected as 'African', have already determined a place for me without respecting my right to own my own image. It makes me wonder how many images of the world are real. I am not even sure this forum will make a difference, but at least it is a chance to state how I feel and why the future seems so bleak."

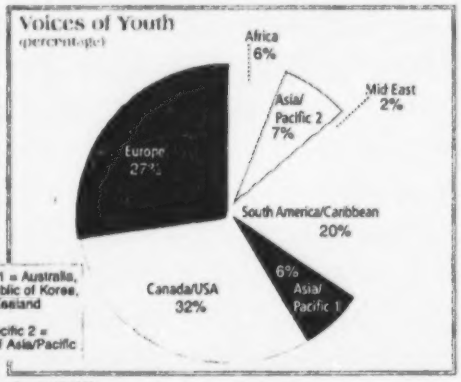
Alison is one of thousands of young people who are exchanging ideas and opinions as part of Voices of Youth. The UNICEF web project links young people from diverse social classes and economic backgrounds from all corners of the globe. Working closely with UNICEF field offices and an extensive network of NGOs worldwide, Voices of Youth enables young people from middle class backgrounds to exchange ideas with other young people in poorer communities throughout the world, in industrialized and developing countries alike. Among those participating in conversations are out-of-school youth in Mongolia; street children from Bangladesh and Costa Rica; war-affected youth from Colombia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Yugoslavia; youth with hearing disabilities from Iran; and HIV-positive youth from many areas.

There are three frameworks for learning and dialogue in Voices of Youth – The Meeting Place, The Learning Place and The Teachers Place – where youth who log on can learn about children who work, discrimination against girls, children affected by war and the risks children encounter in some of the world's largest and fastest growing cities. They can share their thoughts and read opinions from other young people. Through the site's interactive quizzes, they can test their knowledge about girls' rights, polio, HIV/AIDS and child labour. Young people can participate in youth-to-youth and youth-to-policy maker dialogues through 12 web discussion forums and regular Internet chats. Teachers and youth leaders can discuss Internet resources, interactive learning methods and how to make the most of the website.

Since it began in 1995, the web project has recorded more than 26,000 messages from young people in more than 110 countries and more than 200 messages from world leaders. The messages are used to engage and inform world leaders and to develop strategies to address the rights and needs of young people. The web project is in English, French and Spanish at http://www.unicef.org/voy/



Source: NUA Internet Surveys (Nov. 2000).



Source: UNICEF.

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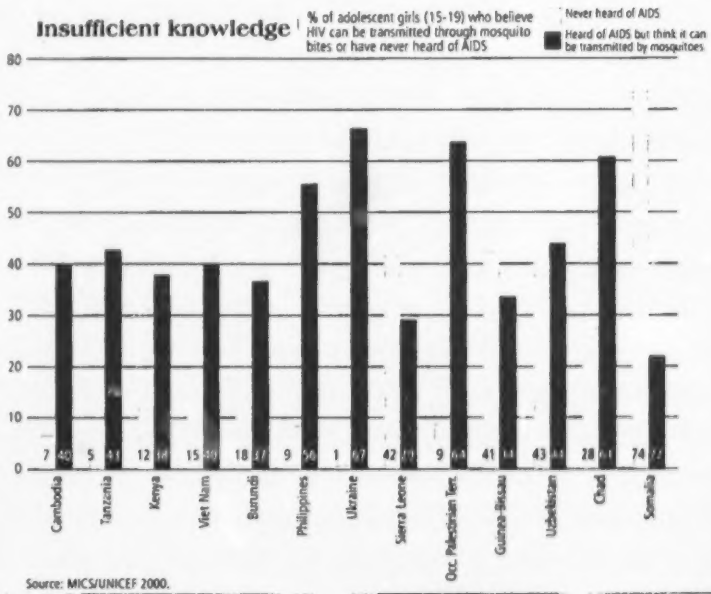
You Need to Know...

Although most young people become healthy and productive adults, many do not. Behaviours begun in adolescence can critically shape a life's course as well as the future of a whole society. Some behaviours cause immediate danger; others, like a time bomb, can cause damage years later without warning.

HIV/AIDS: The facts

- Every minute, six young people below the age of 25 become infected with HIV. Around the world, as of end 2001, 11.8 million young people are living with HIV, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Unsafe sexual activity and an increase in intravenous drug use are paving the way for an AIDS crisis in Eastern Europe, South Asia and the Caribbean. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, for example, the estimated number of people living with HIV climbed from 150,000 at the end of 1997 to 1 million by the end of 2001. Most of the new infections are among injecting drug users.
- In eight African countries where at least 15% of adults are currently infected with HIV, around a third of today's 15-year-olds will die of AIDS.



Source: MICS/UNICEF 2000.

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You Need to Know...

Miguel Chikaoka/Kamara Kó

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T KNOW CAN KILL THEM

Q: Name one way to protect yourself from HIV.

A: In Mozambique, where HIV prevalence is as high as 13%, 74% of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 were unable to name a single way to protect themselves from the infection.

Q: Can a healthy-looking person have the AIDS virus?

A: In 15 of 34 countries surveyed, 50% or more of girls aged 15 to 19 did not know that someone who looks healthy can be infected with HIV and transmit it to others.

Q: How is AIDS transmitted?

A: In Cambodia, approximately one half of urban young people surveyed, aged 11 to 20, thought HIV could be transmitted by coughing, sneezing and mosquitoes.

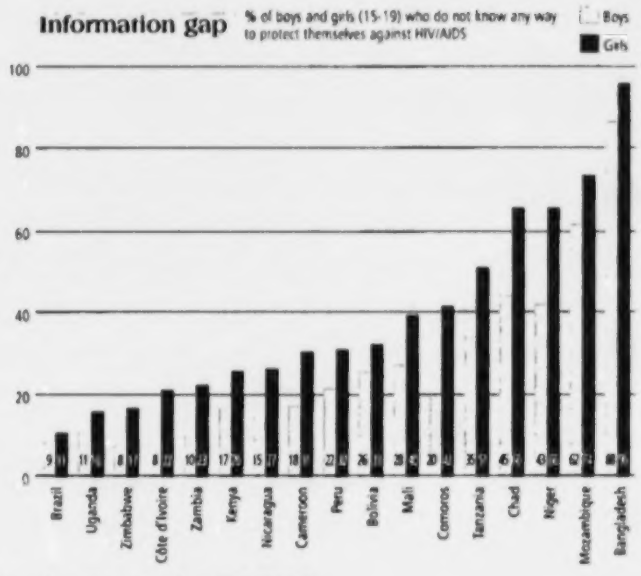
How young people learn about HIV

The vast majority of young people learn about sexual matters and HIV through their friends.

Girls especially vulnerable

Girls are two to four times more likely to become infected than boys for biological reasons. Persistent gender discrimination, poverty and inequality also place adolescent girls at an especially high risk for contracting HIV.

- HIV-infection rates in teenage girls in some



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), 1994-1999

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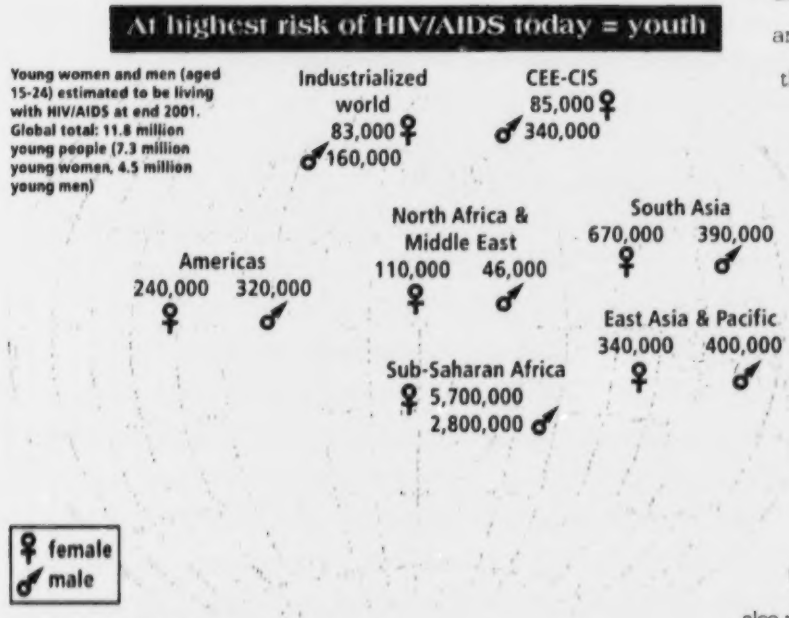

urban areas in sub-Saharan Africa are more than five times higher than those among teenage boys.

- The Caribbean: HIV rates are five times higher in girls than in boys aged 15-19 in Trinidad and Tobago. At one surveillance centre for pregnant women in Jamaica, girls in their late teens had almost twice the prevalence rate of older women.
- Girls are more likely than boys to be uninformed about HIV. Girls are also more likely than boys to be coerced or raped, or to be enticed into having sex with someone older, wealthier or more powerful, such as school teachers, employers or older, 'sugar daddies' who offer them money or pay for school fees in return for sex, heightening their risk of exposure to the virus.

UNICEF/98-0577/Pirozzi

Children left behind

Adolescents are often forced to drop out of school because there is no money for school fees, as well as to care for an ailing parent and younger siblings and to contribute to running the household. They must cope not only with the slow and painful deaths of sick parents but also with the grief of losing them when they die. Finally, they must endure the stigma of HIV/AIDS.

An estimated 10.4 million children currently under age 15, most of them in Africa, have lost their mothers or both their parents to AIDS, the majority of them are adolescents.

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You Need to Know...

UNICEF/00-0435/Balaguer

GOOD NEWS

The majority of adolescents are healthy and well-adjusted, and they contribute to their families and society.

Surveys of school youth from nine Caribbean countries revealed that about 83% of adolescents report feeling "okay or happy" with the way they look, and 93% say they like school.

A survey representing the opinions of 103 million adolescents aged 9 to 18 throughout Latin America and the Caribbean revealed that 76% think their life is going to be better than that of their parents.

A cross-cultural study of American, Australian, Colombian, Indian, Palestinian and South African 14-year-olds found that adolescents who are well connected with their parents (they feel understood, are cared for and get along well with their parents) have more social initiative, fewer thoughts about suicide and less depression.

In Benin, only 17% of children aged 10-14 whose parents have died attend school, compared to 50% of those with both parents still living.

Hopeful signs

Young people are the key to slowing down the spread of HIV.

- Studies across a range of cultures have shown that education about reproductive health and AIDS does not lead to premature sexual activity; on the contrary, it can lead to delays in the age of first intercourse.
- In Côte d'Ivoire, in 1993, only 5% of sexually active boys and girls aged 15-19 used condoms. By 1998, one third of sexually active teenagers reported always using condoms.
- In Masaka (Uganda), HIV-prevalence rates among 13- to 19-year-old girls fell significantly between 1989 and 1997 from 4.5% to 1.5%, reflecting a trend towards a decrease in sexual activity among girls and increased condom use.
- In most Western European countries, some 60% of young people were using condoms the first time they had sex – up from less than 20% a decade ago.

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TEENAGE SEXUALITY, PREGNANCY AND CHILDBEARING

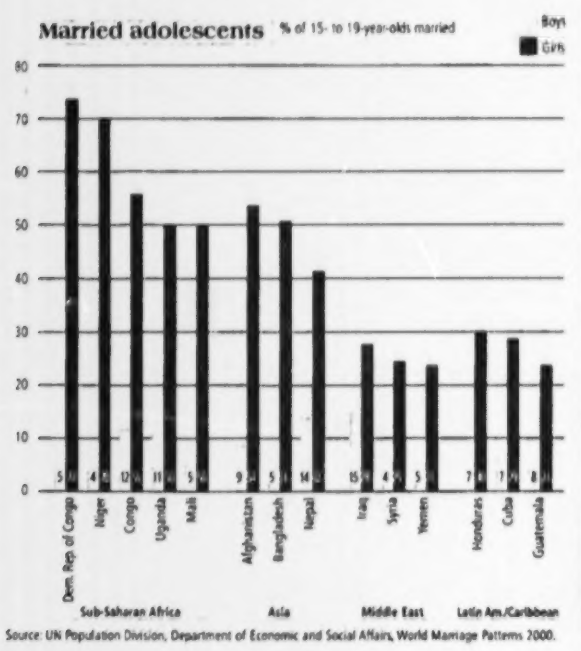
Starting young

- Half of the young women in Haiti, Jamaica and Nicaragua reported being sexually active by age 18.
- In 8 of 14 countries surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa, more than 20% of 15- to 19-year-olds had lost their virginity before age 15.
- In poor urban communities, where children are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, sexual initiation occurs at a very young age. In a survey of 1,600 children and adolescents in four poor communities in the Zambian capital, Lusaka, over a quarter of children aged 10 said they had already had sex, and the figure rose to 60% among 14-year-olds. In South Africa, 10% of those surveyed in six provinces said they had started having sex at age 11 or younger.
- The majority of sexually active adolescent girls in the developing world are married.

When girls marry early ...

The younger the girl, the larger the age difference with her husband, making it harder for her to participate as an equal partner in the marriage. Young married girls:

- are less likely to continue their education.
- are likely to have children in quick succession, severely jeopardizing their health. Their husbands, families and even some health providers may deny them contraceptives until they bear a child.
- lack the power to negotiate safe sex practices, which may make them even more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than unmarried girls.



Source: UN Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Marriage Patterns 2000.

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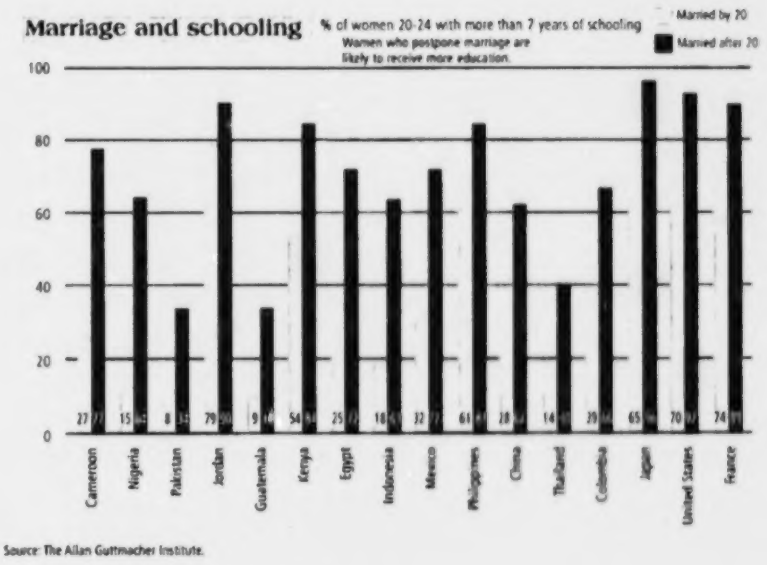
You Need to Know...

- are often denied their rights. In many countries women need their husband's permission to buy or sell property, to travel outside the country or to take up employment. In some countries, women are considered legal property of their husbands and widows can even be "inherited" along with other property.



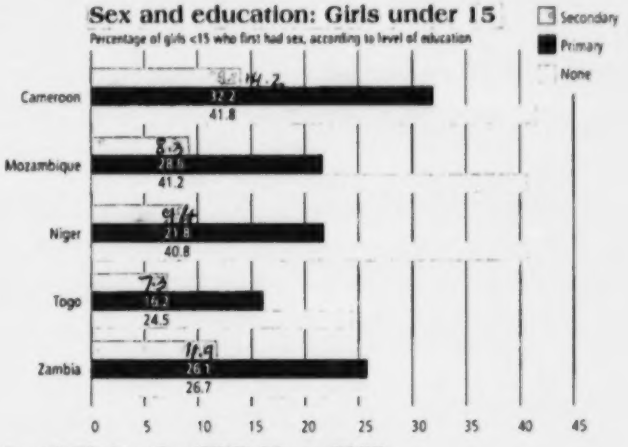
Source: The Allan Guttmacher Institute.

Having babies ...

- Approximately 1 out of every 10 births worldwide is to an adolescent mother – about 13 million infants each year.
- Adolescent mothers (but not teenage fathers) are often obliged to leave school.
- Children born to an adolescent mother are more likely to die within their first month of life compared to those whose mothers are older. A child of an adolescent mother is more likely to suffer from poor nutrition as well as late physical and cognitive development.

... and dying

- Every year, at least 60,000 adolescents die from problems related to pregnancy and childbirth.
- The risk of dying during childbirth is twice as high among teenage girls over 15 than among mothers in their 20s. For girls under 15, the risk is five times greater.
- Each year, up to 4.4 million girls aged 15 to 19 undergo unsafe abortions.



Sources: *World Development Report 2000/2001*; DHS surveys 1996-2000.

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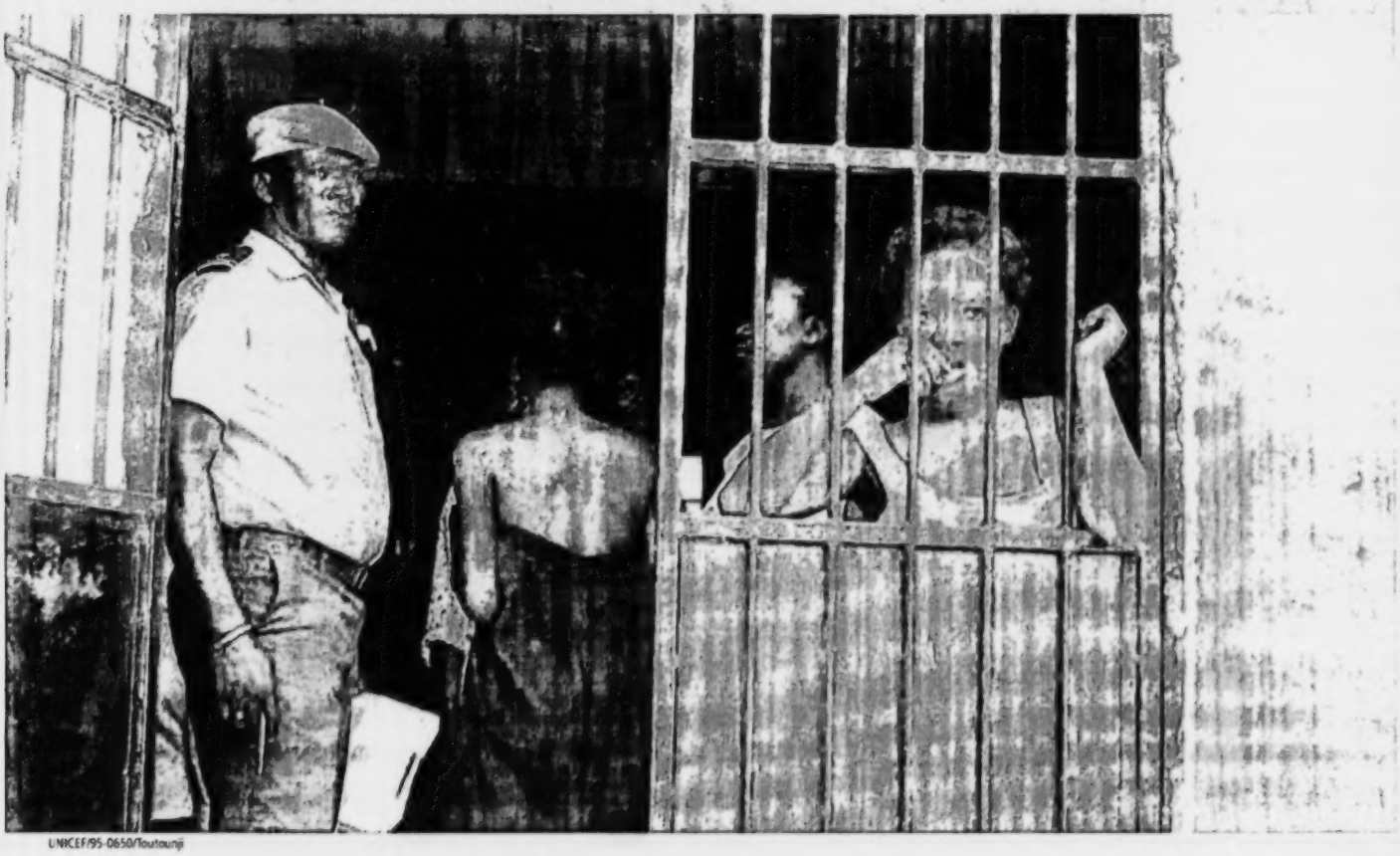
VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION

Urban violence

Young males are frequently victims as well as perpetrators of violent crimes. One explanation is that boys are socialized to see anger and aggression as appropriate 'male' emotions, while it is socially acceptable for girls to express fear and sadness.

- Children learn violent behaviours from family members, peers, in their neighbourhoods and through various forms of media. Abused children are more likely to abuse their future children and partners. A US study found that an abused or neglected child is 53% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile; 38% more likely to be arrested as an adult; and 38% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.
- Surveys from nine Caribbean countries revealed that one fifth of males reported carrying a weapon to school in the previous 30 days; and nearly as many have been in a fight using weapons. One in five boys and one in eight girls report that, at some time, they have belonged to a gang. Two out of five report that they sometimes think about hurting or killing someone.
- In Ciudad Juaréz (Mexico) in 1998, there were over 400 street gangs involved in turf battles and violence and using children to traffic in arms and drugs.
- In the United States, homicide is the second leading cause of death in young people aged 15-24.

You Need to Know...



UNICEF/95-0650/Toutounji

In conflict with the law

When they are arrested, young people may face harsh punishment and be denied the legal protections afforded to adults. Many countries do not have a separate juvenile justice system.

- In some countries, a judge can put children in jail because they are dirty or sleeping on the street, have run away from home or have lost their identity papers.
- Of all phases of the justice procedure, it is on arrest and immediately thereafter, while in police custody, that an accused juvenile is most likely to become the victim of torture and denied the presence of parents, a social worker or a legal representative.
- During the pre-trial period, which can last more than a year, juveniles may be placed with adults, held in unhealthy cells – which lack supervision by trained staff – and denied educational or recreational activities.
- In Kenya, the three most common legal bases for the detention of children in juvenile remand homes are: "destitution and vagrancy," "beyond parental control" and "found begging."
- In Kyrgyzstan, boys charged with 'serious' offences, including minor property offences, are detained in a wing of the youth penal colony for an average of six months where they are allowed just one hour of daily exercise and have no access to education or family visits.

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- A 1995 survey of secondary school-age children in the institutions of the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior found that 50% reported unwanted sexual contact and up to 30% reported having been raped.

Armed conflict

In developing countries, the majority of soldiers in armed conflicts are 10 to 24 years old. Child soldiers are recruited by conscription, abduction and coercion. Many are killed, and far more become disabled, both physically and psychologically.

- There are an estimated 300,000 child soldiers at any given time, actively involved in conflict around the world.
- Women and girls during armed conflict are continuously threatened by rape, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual humiliation and mutilation. Adolescent girls are often pushed into 'forced marriages', subjected to relentless physical and emotional violence. Many become infected with STIs and increasingly with HIV.
- Girls may suffer in silence, fearing reprisals from those who attacked them or rejection from their families. Many become pregnant; some commit suicide.
- Adolescent refugees, displaced by conflict or human rights violations, are denied access to health services, educational and vocational training, psychological counselling and income-generating opportunities.

Forced sex: Exposing the secret

The younger women are when they first have intercourse, the more likely it is that they have had unwanted or involuntary sex.

- In Lima (Peru), it was found that 90% of young mothers aged 12 to 16 were victims of rape – the majority by their father, stepfather or other male relative.
- In the United States, 4 in 10 girls who had first intercourse at age 13 or 14 report it was either non-voluntary or unwanted.
- Among girls aged 11 to 15 in Jamaica, 40% reported the reason for their first intercourse as "forced."
- A study of 12- to 17-year-olds in South Africa revealed that 65% were concerned about their personal safety, with 62% citing fear of sexual or physical abuse as a concern.
- Girls who have been sexually abused during childhood are more likely to engage in early sexual intercourse and are at a greater risk of unwanted and early pregnancies and of contracting STIs

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and HIV. Globally, 1 out of every 20 adolescents contracts a curable STI every year. STIs increase a person's risk of becoming infected with HIV.

Forced prostitution

Children involved in forced prostitution confront serious health risks every day, including unwanted pregnancies, drug addiction, STIs and HIV. There are no adequately documented statistics on the number of children involved in prostitution. Also, definitions of child prostitution vary. Some estimates include street children who may sell sex if someone makes an offer; others include children working only in brothels or massage parlours, where many are kept in a state that is indistinguishable from slavery.

- Approximately 1 million children enter the sex trade every year.
- Debt bondage, in which girls and boys must work to pay off the money loaned to parents and guardians, is a frequent form of entry into prostitution in many countries, including India.

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Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand. Asia Watch, an NGO, has reported that as many as 50,000 Nepalese girls have been sold and trafficked to India as bonded labour in Mumbai brothels.

- 'Sex tourists' deliberately travel abroad to have sex with children. Some companies cater specifically to men seeking young girls and boys. Children can even be delivered to a condominium and be part of the deal of a vacation or stay.
- Some poor families sell their daughters to the sex industry in order to supplement household income. According to a study in Thailand, 50% of prostitutes entered the sex industry because of their parents' financial need.
- In West Africa, tens of thousands of children of destitute families are reportedly sent as domestic workers to the Middle East each year, many of them ending up sexually exploited.

interferes with schooling, recreation, to get jobs later in life.

health and young people's ability

GETTING HIGH

SMOKING

Worldwide, some 250 million children and teenagers will eventually die as a result of their tobacco habit.

Who's smoking?

- The majority of smokers start before the age of 18.
- A survey of 12 developing or transitional countries found that about 20% of school children in these countries are regular smokers. The survey also found that nearly 25% of the child smokers started smoking before age 10.

Targeting kids

- Tobacco companies spend billions each year sponsoring sporting events, putting their cigarette logos on T-shirts and baseball caps, giving away free samples in shopping malls and at rock concerts and discos and encouraging the positive portrayal of smoking in movies.
- Sophisticated tobacco advertising links smoking with images of adventure, physical attractiveness, sexual success and even athletic ability.
- Teenagers are more likely to be influenced to smoke by cigarette advertising than by peer pressure.

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Getting hooked

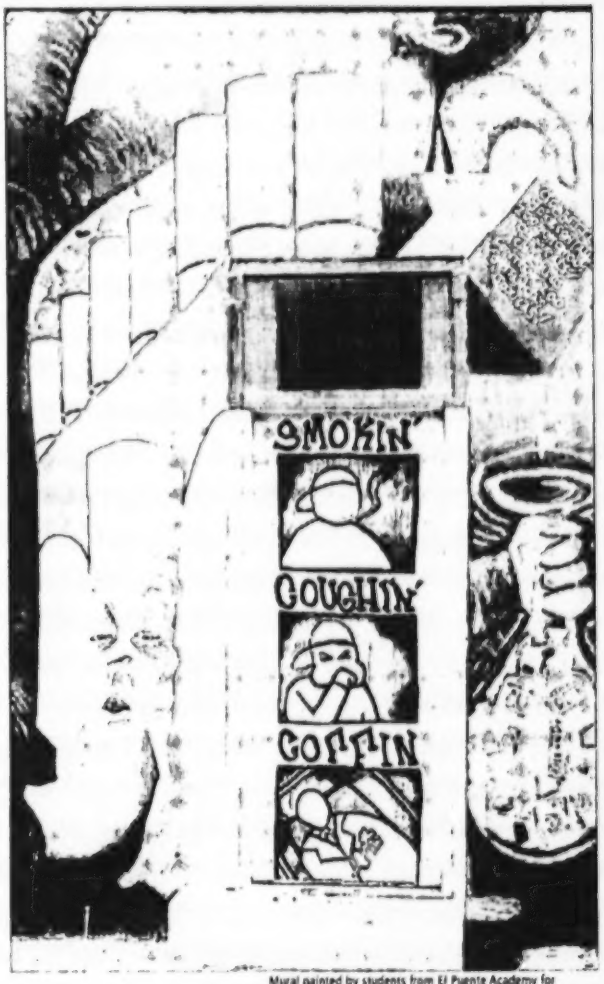
- According to the US Surgeon General, nicotine is similar in addictiveness to heroin and cocaine.
- Compared with non-smokers, American teenagers who smoked at least 20 cigarettes a day had 12 times the risk of suffering panic attacks and 5 times the risk of generalized anxiety disorder and agoraphobia, a fear of open spaces that makes some people unable to leave home.
- Young people who smoke are more likely to use illicit drugs and drink more heavily than their non-smoking peers.

Who's smoking?

Percentage of 15-year-olds who report smoking daily

	BOYS		GIRLS	
	1998	1994	**1998**	1994
Austria	20	21	26	21
Belgium	21	19	20	14
Canada	17	16	21	21
Czech Rep.	16	11	11	6
Denmark	15	10	21	17
Estonia	17	16	8	3
Finland	19	25	20	19
France	20	18	25	18
Germany	22	16	25	19
Hungary	29	19	20	13
Israel	17	6	7	5
Latvia	27	22	12	8
Lithuania	15	9	6	2
Norway	18	16	21	15
Poland	22	17	14	8
Russian Fed.	20	13	14	5
Slovakia	20	13	10	3
Sweden	10	10	16	13
N. Ireland	16	20	24	20
Scotland	19	17	24	21
United States	13	10	12	10

Source: WHO



Mural painted by students from El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, in Brooklyn, New York (United States).

Alcohol and drug abuse

Although a young person may try drugs for a number of reasons – curiosity, peer pressure, rebellion, low self-esteem – young chronic drug users tend to be out of school, alienated from their families and easily influenced by their peers.

- Alcohol and other drug use are often related to the main cause of death among young men worldwide: road traffic accidents. For every young person killed, another 10 are seriously injured or maimed for life.

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- Alcohol and drug use are also linked to domestic abuse, violence, academic and work problems, exploitation and crime. Alcohol and drug users are also at higher risk of contracting STIs and HIV.
- A survey in Romania found that one third of 11-year-old boys had consumed alcohol and that most males are occasional or regular drinkers by age 16.
- In the United States in 1997, among 12th graders, 38% of boys and 24% of girls reported 'binge' drinking (having had five or more consecutive drinks within the previous two weeks).
- The earlier illicit drug use begins, the more likely it is that the individual will take other types of drugs and will consume them more frequently.
- In the United States, the use of the drug Ecstasy (a synthetic stimulant) doubled in five years, from 5% of teens reporting its use in 1995 to 10% in 2000.
- In Ukraine and in the city of St. Petersburg (Russian Federation), up to 20% of 'injectable' drug users are teenagers, with the youngest around age 12.
- In Almaty (Kazakhstan), surveys among drug users indicate that among the approximately 40,000 drug users in the city, half are under the age of 18.

Mental health and suicide

Early signs of emotional disorders frequently appear during adolescence, yet they are often undiagnosed and go untreated. Young people with mental health disorders are at a greater risk for dropping out of school, ending up in jail and of not being fully functional members of society in adulthood.

- Approximately 4 million adolescents attempt suicide around the world each year – of these at least 100,000 are successful. Three times more females than males attempt suicide, but three times more men than women are successful.
- In the United States, 1 in 10 children and adolescents suffer from mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment. Fewer than 1 in 5 receive treatment.

UNICEF/00-0111/Lewnes

Risks rise between ages 11 and 15

A World Health Organization cross-national research study of 11-, 13- and 15-year-old schoolchildren in 28 countries revealed that young people are especially vulnerable to drug exposure and increased use of drugs between the ages of 11 and 15.

Students who report having been drunk twice or more often

	11-yr-olds	13-yr-olds	15-yr-olds
Denmark	5	23	67
England	6	24	52
Austria	3	10	43
Slovakia	12	18	40

Source: HBSC survey (1997/1998).

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Adolescents on the edge

Street children, working children, refugee children, young people in institutional care, child soldiers and sexually exploited youth abuse drugs mainly for functional reasons: to keep awake for work, to get to sleep, to reduce physical and emotional pain or to alleviate hunger. According to a study in South Africa, as many as 9 out of 10 street children are thought to be dependent on glue.

The cheapest and most available substances and where they are found:

- glue – in market places
- solvents – in industrial areas
- coca products – in the Andean region
- opiates – in opium producing areas
- alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and pharmaceutical drugs – everywhere.

Education and work

Adolescents work everywhere in all kinds of jobs, often for their own or their families' survival. Sometimes the work prepares them for future employment but, too often, it is hazardous and exploitative and interferes with schooling, recreation, health and ultimately young people's ability to get better jobs later in life.

At work ...

- In Egypt, one third of adolescents work, with one out of every two boys involved in economic activities outside the home, compared to one out of every six girls.

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- In Latin America and the Caribbean, working children and adolescents have an average of two years less education than those who do not work. Two years less education translates over a working lifetime to a monthly income about 20% lower than average.

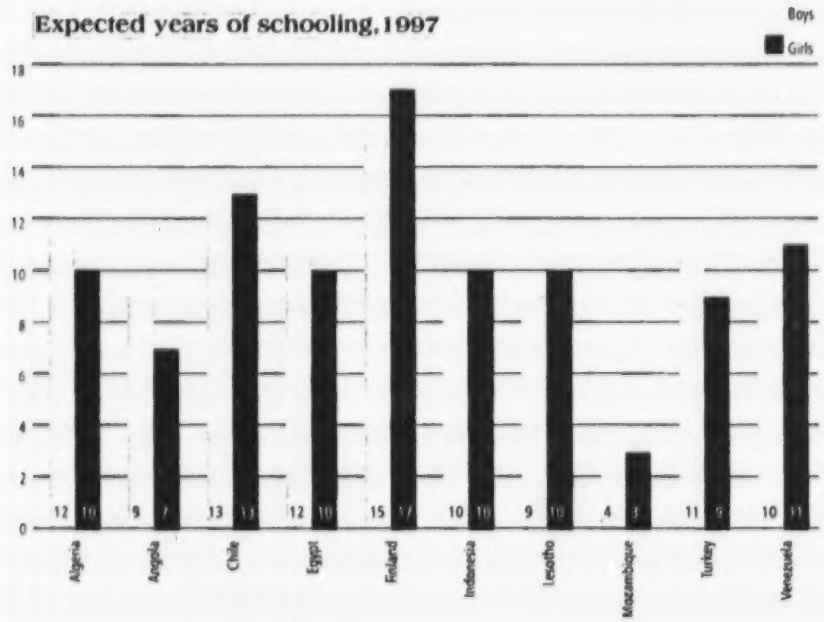
... and in school

- Many children in primary school are adolescents.
- About 53% of out-of-school children are girls.
- In Egypt, half of boys and one sixth of girls work in an income-generating activity. More than half of these adolescents are under the age of 15.

Where are the girls?

Many girls are at home helping with household chores and caring for younger siblings or working for others as domestic workers. As many as 90% of child domestic workers – the largest group of child workers in the world – are girls, the majority between 12 and 17 years old. Adolescent domestic workers may be the most vulnerable and exploited children of all:

- They are deprived of schooling and social activity, as well as emotional support from friends and family.
- They are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse.
- The work they do is not recognized as productive labour and they do not benefit from skills that will improve their lives.
- They are often poorly paid or not paid at all.



Source: World Development Report 2000/2001.

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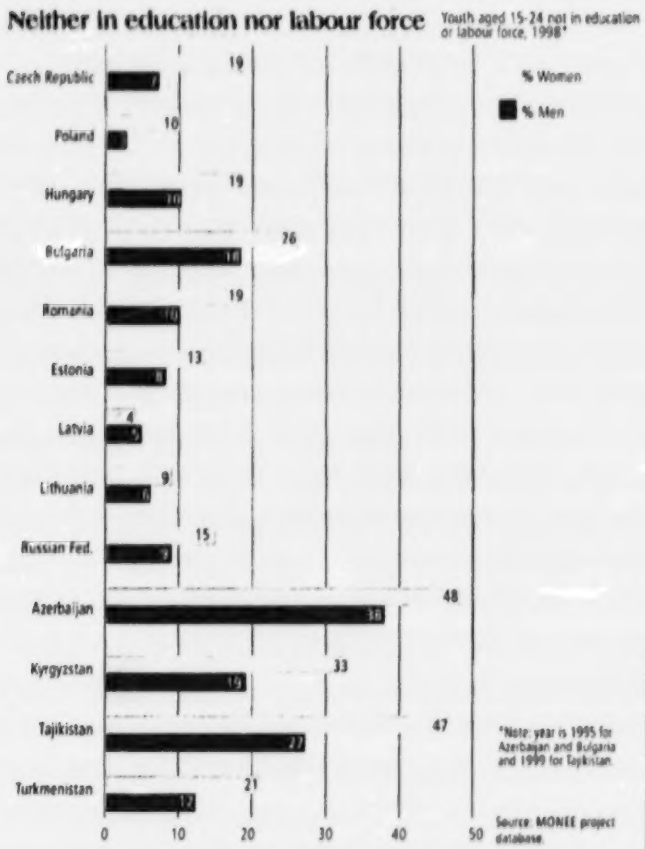

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Unemployment

Too many young people are unable to find satisfying work at a time when they need to feel valued, productive and independent. This dramatically increases their risk of engaging in crime, early unwed parenting and drug use.

Urban youth aged 15 to 24 in Latin America are about twice as likely as the total population to want or need jobs but are unable to find them. Youth unemployment (15-24) runs between 36% and 66%.

In 1998, an estimated 8 million of the 65 million young people aged 15 to 24 in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in the Commonwealth of Independent States were looking for work but unable to find it. An additional 10 million 15- to 24-year-olds were neither in school nor in the labour system.

As many as 90% of child domestic workers – the largest group of child workers in the world – are girls, the majority between 12 and 17 years old.

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Nutrition

"...how effectively young people navigate the shoals of adolescence will be a crucial element in how well all of humanity weathers the challenges of the new century." – Carol Bellamy

Anaemia

In early adolescence, iron requirements are high for both boys and girls due to rapid physical growth. In later adolescence, girls, because of the loss of iron during menstruation, are generally more anaemic than boys.

- According to an analysis of 39 country studies, 27% of adolescents in developing countries were anaemic, compared to 6% in industrialized countries. In India, 55% of adolescent girls were anaemic; in Guatemala, 48%; in Nepal, 42%; and in Cameroon, 32%.
- In females, anaemia can increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, low birthweight, perinatal mortality and maternal mortality.

Obesity and eating disorders

Childhood obesity is the leading cause of paediatric hypertension, is associated with Type II diabetes mellitus, increases the risk of coronary heart disease, increases stress in the weight-bearing joints, lowers self-esteem and affects relationships with peers.

- An estimated 13% of all Americans under the age of 19 are overweight or obese.
- In the United States, obesity primarily affects poor people and is especially prevalent among Native Americans, Latinos and African Americans.
- In South Africa, over 30% of Black women over the age of 15 are obese.
- Anorexia nervosa (self-starvation) and bulimia nervosa (binge eating followed by purging) tend to particularly affect adolescents in industrialized countries. One in 10 individuals with anorexia dies as a result of their illness. Girls are about 10 times more prone to developing these eating disorders than boys.
- Surveys of school students in nine Caribbean countries revealed that 31% are not satisfied with their weight. About one sixth have used at least one weight-loss method, including dieting or exercise (15%), laxatives (15%), vomiting (8%) or diet pills (6%).

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$10.00
ISBN: 92-806-3737-1
Sales no: E.01.XX.13

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February 2002

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